

Bradley R. Smith

Profiles in History

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Bradley R. Smith was born into a working-class family in South Central Los Angeles on February 18, 1930, where the family remained until 1970. He was a good student on occasion, but was more interested in horses than education. At 18 he joined the army and in 1951 served in the 7th Cavalry in Korea, where he was wounded twice. It was in the army hospital at Camp Cooke, California where he began to write.

In the 1950s he searched for something beyond writing that could hold his attention. He became a deputy sheriff for Los Angeles County, but that wasn't it. He left the department to travel to Mexico where he became involved with the bullfights, becoming a *novillero*—an apprentice bullfighter—in the central mountain states of Jalisco, Guerrero and Hidalgo. The bulls very much had his attention, but his liver gave out with hepatitis and he had to return to the States for hospitalization.

In 1958 Smith went to New York City, where he worked for The Bodley Gallery on East 60th Street. He discovered the intellectual and cultural life of Greenwich Village, a new world for him. In the Village he read a bootleg copy of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and was, literally, rocked by it. He returned to Los Angeles where he opened a bookstore on Hollywood Boulevard specializing in paperback books, which were at that time new and all the rage. When *Tropic* was published he dedicated himself to promoting the book in his store windows. He was arrested, jailed, and prosecuted for refusing to stop selling the book.



Bradley R. Smith (18 Feb 1930- 18 Feb 2016)

The ensuing trial lasted six weeks, the longest criminal trial ever to have taken place in Los Angeles at that time.¹ There was considerable press coverage. Smith was intrigued by the proceedings. For six weeks he watched and listened to academics and writers and community leaders argue under oath that *Tropic* should be censored and those selling it be punished because the book expressed sensibilities that did not meet, legally, “community standards.” Leon Uris, author of *Exodus*, particularly caught Smith’s attention by arguing that Miller, a writer obviously more important to American culture than he,

should be censored. In 1962 Smith was convicted for selling a book that "endangered" the community standards of Greater Los Angeles.

In the 1960s Smith patrolled the streets of Hollywood as a deputy sheriff and worked as a seaman on merchant ships. He shipped to Japan, the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, and Taiwan. In 1968 he jumped ship in Thailand and made his way to Saigon where he traveled the country as a correspondent with accreditation by the Vietnamese. Meanwhile, in Hollywood, he had met a Jewish woman; they had exchanged hearts, each with the other, in a relationship that lasted into the mid-1970s.

Then it happened.

In 1979, when Smith was 49 years old, his life changed forever when he read a leaflet by Robert Faurisson, "The Problem of the Gas Chambers." The story of this life-changing moment is recounted in his autobiographical work, *Confessions of a Holocaust Revisionist*. Smith writes, "I felt stunned, as if Buck Rogers had somehow come down from the 21st century and zapped me with a beam from his ray gun." It took him three months to digest the core of the revisionist argument. And then, like a toreador emerging from the callejón, he jumped into the struggle. He knew from the beginning that he was going to address the taboo against publishing revisionist arguments, not the arguments themselves. He would be the "Henry Miller" of the revisionists. Not as famous as Miller, not as original, but his job needed doing, desperately.

Through his efforts in the years that followed, millions of Americans learned for the first time about Holocaust revisionism and the scholarly debate on this chapter of history. In the mid-1980s, he published *Prima Facie*, a newsletter aimed at journalists and editors, quoting their own writings, that focused on cultism, suppression of free inquiry and censorship on the Holocaust issue.

Smith had a long association with the Institute for Historical Review—as a contributor to their publications, as a speaker at conferences, and, during the late 1980s, as its media projects director, a role that generated hundreds of radio and television interviews.

Starting in the late 1980s and on through to his death, he had been active as director of the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust (CODOH), a group dedicated to defending free speech and free inquiry on the Holocaust issue, to encouraging greater public access to revisionist scholarship, and to promoting awareness of the controversy regarding the Holocaust story and censorship measures deployed in its perpetuation.

Since 1990, Smith published a newsletter, *Smith's Report*, which reports on his own activities, those of CODOH, and various articles and news stories about revisionists and revisionism around the world.

Smith is perhaps best known for having published several essay-length advertisements calling for open debate on the Holocaust in student newspapers published at colleges and universities across the United States. In the 1991-92 school year, CODOH advertisements or statements appeared in 17 student newspapers, several at major universities. During the 1993-1994 academic year, his ad—headlined "A Revisionist Challenge to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum"—appeared in at least 35 college and university campus papers, as well as one major metropolitan daily. In 1999 and 2000, Smith created a new publication, *The Revisionist*, a 24-page pulp-stock publication that was distributed free on campus. The January 2000 issue, which featured a story on intellectual freedom and book-burning was

itself burned on the campus of St. Cloud University. By the end of the 2000-01 academic year, his ads had appeared in more than 350 student papers.

Smith's campaign generated news reports and commentary in such prominent periodicals as *The New York Times* and *Time* magazine, and editorials in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *the Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.

Deborah Lipstadt, a Jewish academic and a prominent figure in the Holocaust lobby, took aim at Bradley's efforts in her *Denying the Holocaust*. One chapter of her book, "The Battle for the Campus," focuses specifically on Smith's advertisements. She laments that after seeing the ads, many students might assume there is an "other side" [to the Holocaust story.]

Smith spoke on the subject of intellectual freedom with regard to the Holocaust on more than 400 radio talk shows and news broadcasts, as well as on nationwide television, including an appearance with Michael Shermer (*Skeptic Magazine*) and David Cole as a guest on the Phil Donahue Show.

Bradley Smith and CODOH were one of the first Holocaust revisionist groups to develop a website in the early '90s. Since that time he has hosted several sites, blogs, a MySpace page, a Facebook page, and participated in many discussion groups and forums on-line.

He wrote many articles, and several books. The first, *Confessions of a Holocaust Revisionist*, was praised by Canadian journalist Doug Collins as "fascinating" and as an "amusing walk through the valley of the shadow of doubt."

Smith's *Break His Bones: The Private Life of a Holocaust Revisionist*, is a witty and thoughtful 315-page memoir published in 2002 that looks back on the challenges, disappointments and triumphs of his years-long battle against taboo and censorship. *Break His Bones* details the organized campaign to suppress free speech and intellectual freedom on the Holocaust issue, showing how skeptics are blacklisted, and their works banned. Smith provided a human face for the much-maligned "Holocaust deniers." "It might be said," he wrote, that *Break His Bones* "is an exercise revealing the subjective life of a thought criminal."

In December 2006, Smith was invited to and delivered a talk to an international delegation at the Tehran Holocaust Conference, "The Irrational Vocabulary of the American Professorial Class with Regard to the Holocaust Question."

In 2008, Nine-Banded Books published his third book, *The Man Who Saw His Own Liver*. *Liver* was conceived and written as a one-act play. It was performed in Los Angeles in 1983, under the title *The Man Who Stopped Paying*. A review of the performance labeled Smith "an anarchist libertarian."

Six years later, in 2014, Smith published a collection of his writing from the 1950s to the 1980s entitled, *A Personal History of Moral Decay*. Tito Perdue commented on Bradley's final book calling it "a generous, lapidary, and much appreciated gift."

Bradley Smith passed away in California on February 18, 2016, his 86th birthday. The momentum of those he inspired, far from waning, waxes apace.

Notes:

1

People v. Bradley Reed Smith. 24 October 1962.

Online: http://codoh.com/media/files/documents/newsite/pdf/xpeople_vs01.pdf

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